

7 Steps for Couples to Resolve Conflict (Without Damaging the Relationship)

Conflict is normal.

Feeling unsafe during conflict is what causes damage.

These steps are not about winning.

They're about keeping the relationship intact while telling the truth.

Before You Start: One Rule

You are on the **same side of the problem**, not opposite sides of each other.

If that's not true in your body yet — pause.

1. Regulate Before You Talk

If either of you is flooded, stop.

- Raised voices, shutdown, sarcasm, panic = nervous system overload.
- Take a break with a clear return time.
- Walking away without repair is not regulation — it's abandonment.

Rule: No problem gets solved while someone feels unsafe.

2. Identify the Real Issue (Together)

Ask:

- “What is this *really* about for you?”
- “What feels threatened here?”

Most couple conflict is about:

- Not feeling important
- Not feeling chosen
- Not feeling emotionally safe

Name *that*, not the surface fight.

3. Each Person Owns Their Part

This is not equal blame — it's shared responsibility.

Each partner answers:

- What I felt
- What I did (or didn't do)
- What I needed but didn't say clearly

No:

- "You always..."
 - "If you hadn't..."
 - Historical character assassinations
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4. Take Turns Listening

Only one person speaks at a time.

The listener's job:

- Reflect back what you heard
- Validate the impact
- Stay present, even if it's uncomfortable

Understanding comes **before** being understood.

5. Repair the Rupture

Repair is not weakness — it's relational skill.

- Acknowledge hurt
- Apologise for impact (not just intent)
- Say what you'd do differently

A repair that works sounds like:

"I see how that landed, and I'm sorry I hurt you."

Defensiveness kills repair. Every time.

6. Make Agreements for Next Time

Don't just understand — **change something.**

- One or two clear, doable agreements
- Focus on future behaviour
- No vague promises

Example:

“When conflict escalates, we take a 20-minute break and come back.”

7. Reconnect on Purpose

Resolution isn't complete until connection is restored.

- Physical closeness
- Shared activity
- Laughter
- Quiet together

This tells the nervous system:

We're okay. We survived this.

Important Couple Truths

- You don't need to resolve everything — you need to **repair reliably.**
- Conflict handled well builds trust.
- Conflict handled badly creates distance, even when “resolved.”

The goal isn't less conflict.

It's **faster repair and safer connection.**
